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## EUGENE FROMENTIN.

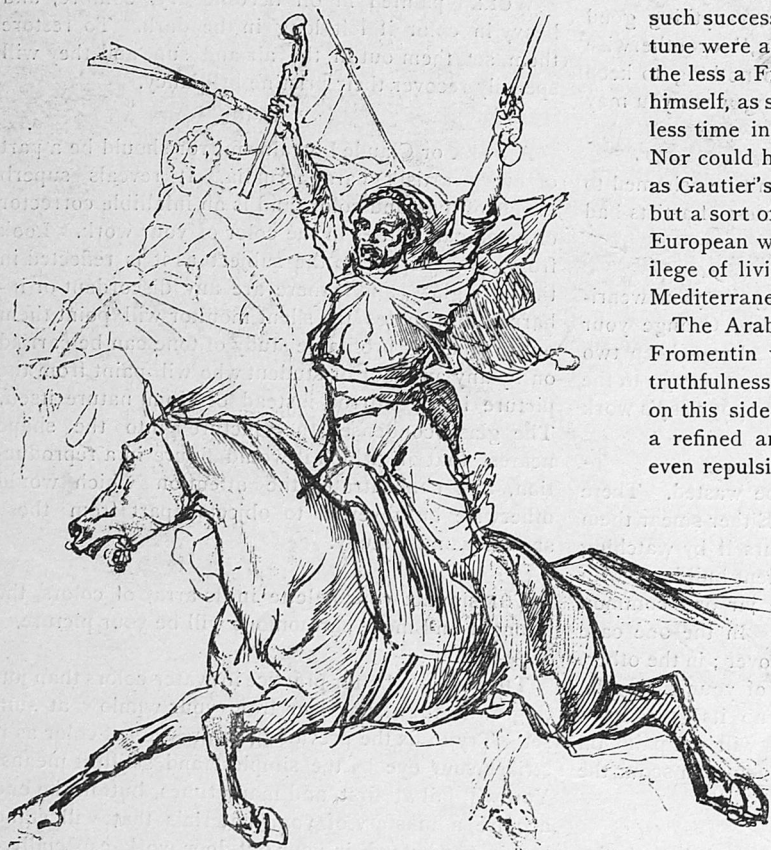
M. LOUIS GONSE'S "Life" adds little to the information that any reader may extract for himself from Fromentin's own books—his "Maîtres d'Autrefois,"



EUGENE FROMENTIN.

"Le Sahel," and "Le Sahara." But its contents, new and old, are well arranged and clearly presented, and the illustrations, consisting of a large number of reproductions of Fromentin's sketches, similar to those that illustrate this article, are alone worth the price of the handsome volume published by Messrs. James R. Osgood & Co.

Fromentin had a hard struggle, both as a painter and as a writer, to gain the position which he finally occupied. M. Gonse traces for us an account of his early years as a notary's apprentice, his struggles with art in Cabot's studio, and the history of his first journey in Algiers at the charge of an archæological society—the turning-point of his career, for it brought him acquainted with the people and the scenery which were henceforth to furnish him with subjects both for pen and pencil.



once with all that is characteristic of the country in a way that no other observer had been. He goes about the narrow streets of the Arab town; makes notes of all that is peculiar to its life from early morning until burning noon and thence on into the evening. He becomes acquainted with the shopkeepers, studies them psychologically as well as physically, and gives the best and completest analysis of the Eastern mind—its dignity, its fatalism, its repose, its ignorance—that is anywhere to be found. Returning home to his little house in the suburbs, he watches the manoeuvres of a band of Arabs who are washing their horses in the sea. He describes the queer vehicles that jog along the dusty road—his neighbor's house, overrun by chickens, and the glories of an African sunset. By and by he sketches the veiled women from the city, picknicking among the tombs, the labors of the native husbandmen, and the sights and occupations of the dismal rainy season. It is this intimate, painstaking study of a race with which he felt a sort of divided sympathy, that afterward shows in his paintings of Arab life. The same deep but delicate insight into the conditions of the artistic problems that he attacked is the source of all that is most valuable in his work as a painter.

In his second journey in the Sahara—the Sahel is the habitable coast region—his opportunities were as sedulously improved and as finely appreciated. When he got back from this journey to Paris, he not only brought with him a great quantity of sketches, notes, and memoranda, but, what was of far greater importance, a profound sentiment of the freedom of the desert, of its color, and of the grace and the majesty of its landscape and its inhabitants. These he set himself to work into pictures and books with such success that, before long, his fame and fortune were assured. Yet he had not become any the less a Frenchman. He had not Orientalized himself, as some other travellers, who spent much less time in the East, pretended they had done. Nor could he see anything in such performances as Gautier's display of his lion cub in the streets but a sort of tomfoolery, unworthy of a civilized European who had enjoyed the inestimable privilege of living upon the Southern shores of the Mediterranean.

The Arab and his belongings are painted by Fromentin with absolute but never with brutal truthfulness. He overcharges his picture neither on this side nor on that; but, being gifted with a refined and delicate organization, he handles even repulsive themes so that his presentation of

them is not repulsive, though as strictly true as the most pronounced naturalist could wish. Be the subject what it may, the workmanship is always neat, delicate, exact.

Perhaps no man ever lived who combined in such equal proportions the qualities of artist and of critic. Or rather one should say that his best qualities were those that are useful to both. In his critical chapters on the old masters of Holland, one finds the same keen insight, the same mi-

He had been attracted by Dutch paintings while he was quite a boy, before his journeyings in Africa, and when leisure and opportunity offered he is supposed



to have studied the masterpieces of the school which were in the Louvre, and even to have gone to Holland to complete his knowledge of them. However this last conjecture may be taken, it is certain that in the "Maîtres d'Autrefois"

the general feeling conveyed is that the author has just been revisiting familiar scenes, while in the Algerian books everything bears the impress of novelty. His criticisms of Rubens, Franz Hals, Rembrandt, Paul Potter, Ruysdael, and the rest are written with the same intelligent precision that one observes in his Algerian sketches; but

there is a certain warmth, a certain air of partiality about them which shows that the ideas about those worthies formed when a boy were still strong in him. Though his latest work, and, in passages, more mel-



The series of letters sent home from Algiers, which, rewritten and elaborated, make up his volume on "Le Sahel," show him to have been impressed at

minute observation of all that is to be seen on the surface, the same brilliant and spiritual touch that distinguish his own works in literature and in art.

low than the others, "The Old Masters," is not as mainly a production as "Le Sahel," nor are his criticisms on Rubens as valuable as his own paintings.